

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (withdrawn) A method for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies, according to which a sheet (15) of thermoformable plastic material is heated to a plasticizing temperature, subsequently causing it to adhere to a shaping surface of a mold (11), comprising the steps of:

- heating the sheet material (15) to a plasticizing temperature, maintaining it in a suspended condition, held along its peripheral edges;

- causing an enrichment of material by pre-shaping the heated sheet (15) of plastic material, at least partially conforming it to a shaping of the mold (11), by performing relative movements of at least part of the peripheral edges of the sheet (15);

- bringing the heated and pre-shaped sheet (15) into an aligned condition with the mold (11), and vacuum forming said pre-shaped sheet (15), making it adhere to the shaping surface of the mold (11).

2. (withdrawn) A method for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies according to claim 1, wherein carrying out an

enrichment step of the plastic sheet material (15), causing the formation of a sag (15A) in a controlled way, during the heating step.

3. (withdrawn) A method for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies according to claim 2, wherein forming, by gravity, a downwardly facing sag (15A), during the heating step.

4. (withdrawn) A method for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies according to claim 2, wherein forming an upwardly facing sag (15A), pneumatically supporting the sheet of material during the heating step.

5. (withdrawn) A method for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies according to claim 1, wherein pre-shaping the sheet material (15), after the enrichment step, by a shaping plug.

6. (withdrawn) A method for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies according to claim 1, wherein holding the sheet material 15 along the peripheral edges by a variable geometry clamping frame (14) comprising articulated and/or longitudinally sliding frame portions (14A, 14B; 14C, 14D, 14E), and causing an enrichment of the sheet material (15) by a relative movement between the frame portions (14A, 14B; 14C, 14D, 14E) of the clamping frame (14).

7. (withdrawn) A method for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies according to claim 1, wherein carrying out the enrichment step of the heated sheet material (15), by a combination of sliding and/or rotational movements for approaching, raising and/or lowering the edges of the plastic sheet (15).

8. (currently amended) ~~An apparatus for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies, from a sheet of plastic material (15) A mold and clamping frame assembly configured for the manufacture of a vacuum thermoformed body from a plastic sheet, comprising:~~

- a thermoforming mold (11) having a sheet shaping surface (12), a peripheral edge and an outer step backward from the peripheral edge;

- a ~~movable~~ sheet clamping frame (14) for holding the sheet (15), said clamping frame (14) peripherally extending all around the mold (11);

- clamping means (23, 26) for gripping the peripheral edges of the sheet (15) along at least part of the sides of a support frame and a first control means conformed to move the clamping frame (14) between a raised position above the mold and a lowered position on the outer step backward from the edge of the mold;

- support means (16) for supporting the clamping frame

~~(14), said support means (16) being positioned and conformed to move the clamping frame (14) between a raised and a lowered position with respect to the mold (11);~~

~~- and in which the clamping frame (14) has a geometrically variable shape providing at least a first and a second frame portion comprises at least first and second frame members (14A, 14B; 14C, 14D, 14E), movable in relation to each other, and a second control means operatively connected to the frame members to selectively change their disposition and geometric configuration of the clamping frame, to pre-shape and conform the plastic sheet to the shaping surface of the mold in the raised position of the clamping frame;~~

the clamping frame comprises two parallel extending top-open air-suction slots having a bottom wall, the suction slots being spaced apart by an intermediate baffle; and

each suction slot comprises a bar having a width smaller than and spaced apart from the bottom wall, to provide narrow air passages in communication with an air suction manifold by suction holes.

and

~~control means being operatively connected to said movable frame portions (14B; 14D), to selectively vary their disposition in conformity with the shaping surface (12) of the mold (11).~~

9-11. (canceled)

12. (currently amended) The apparatus assembly according to claim 8, wherein the clamping frame has a variable geometry ~~frame~~ (14) for holding the plastic sheet (15), and comprises slidable and/or pivotally connected frame portions (14A, 14B, 14C, 14D, 14E) disposable on a same plane.

13-16. (canceled)